

**Vibrant Faith
Called to Lives of Meaning and Purpose Initiative
Pre-Meeting Work 2021**

**Report on hub activities – Create a video, audio, or written document that:
Lists hub activities you hosted in 2021 and hope to do in 2022, including dates if known**

Vibrant Faith has 3 primary activities to report for 2021.

1. In lieu of a final gathering, we held A Celebration of Calling on April 29 and 30, 2021. This was an online event designed for congregation members to be able to join on in Thursday night. We invited Rick Steves to be the speaker and talk about how his calling changed during the pandemic. (Steves was able to keep his 100+ employees working all through the pandemic by re-deploying them to local charities.) People loved Steve’s insights about Travel as a Spiritual Act. I am including the video (90 minutes) of his talk to the 190 people who attended.

On Friday, April 30 we followed with a 4 hour online event for ministry leaders. We began with Vibrant Faith’s partner, Fred Oduyoye speaking about the heightened calling to reconciliation in our country, followed by workshops on various aspects of calling that have bubbled up for churches in the pandemic: Grief, Mental Health issues, Handling Conflict in churches, family discipleship, etc. The Calling for Ministry leaders was also quite well attended with 40 some people joining us online for the afternoon. I am attaching the schedule to this report.

2. Our coaches finished their work with the 24 calling churches at the end of April. We had extended the schedule for their relationship from January 2021, to April 2021 due to the pandemic break in church activity in 2020. In March and April, our coaches held focus groups with various members of the congregations—pastoral leadership, C3 team, congregation members to assess the “culture of calling” that was built. We are still processing the results of those 60+ groups, using Otter.so and qualitative processing software. One of our C3 coaches (also a PhD student) is doing this data processing work for us. We hope to have the themes and insights in report form by January of 2021. Many of our churches also participated in the online survey sponsored by CLMPI Coordination grant.

We were PLANNING to host small in-person meeting with one leader from each church in early November in order to present and discuss those results but delayed that

when the Delta variant became such a strong issue early in the fall. We plan to host that in the first quarter of 2022.

3. Early in 2021, we decided that a 20 minute documentary on “A Culture of Calling” in churches accompanied by a “toolkit” could be a helpful resource for churches and perhaps serve the Lilly Endowment as well. We have been working with a videographer and crew during fall of 2021 to identify examples of calling in the churches and create the storyline to help other churches see what our C3 churches learned and came to appreciate about this powerful but under-utilized theological theme in the Christian church. We have identified the three churches who were able to connect us with compelling expressions of calling, and will begin with our first visit and interviews for the documentary this week. We hope to finish the documentary and have it ready for use in the first quarter of 2022.

What is one point of discernment for your hub heading into 2022?

How can we best use/distribute the documentary that we are creating? What will make it a compelling tool?

Report on congregation activities – Imagine you are talking with a congregational leader from a church who wants to learn how a vocational lens can serve congregational life. The frameworks of calling, meaning, and purpose are new to them. Create a video, audio, or written document that:

- Tell a story of calling and discernment from one of your current congregations and/or one of their members.
- Describes how their efforts on calling and discernment could be adapted in the leader’s congregation.

Here is the story of Jere that was shared with us by First Methodist Church, Lakeland FL

You Are Called to Love

Jere Gault never expected to spend a significant part of his time in retirement with migrant farm workers and their families. He describes himself as “an American who believes in border protection, fiscal conservatism, liberal politics, and a compassionate heart.” After having served six years in the military and thirty-four years working for a national corporation, he retired and now works as a commercial real estate broker. He’s always been a person of faith, loyal to his church and living what he believed was a responsible Christian life.

One day a friend asked him to help transfer ownership of a very small frame house from a landlord to a farm worker family. It was the first time Jere had ever seen the way farm workers live, particularly if they are undocumented. As he got to know the family, he began to struggle to reconcile our current

immigration issues with this family's needs and his personal value system. Here's the way Jere describes his conversation with God:

Me: "God, I'm willing to do whatever you want me to do. Please help me understand your plan for me and how I might reconcile this immigration issue"

God: "Well, there is something I want you to do, but first we need to correct a couple of your perceptions."

Over the next year and a half, a series of seemingly unrelated events began to happen in his life.

The Adult Education director at his church asked him to facilitate a small group using A Disciple's Path. As they made their way through the study, he found himself moving into a deeper understanding of what it might mean for him to love God with his whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love his neighbor as he loved himself.

The Holy Spirit began to expand Jere's understanding of who his neighbor might be. Jere said, "My neighbor was no longer limited by a person's country of origin, legal status (documented or undocumented), or station in life. This expansion of thought added a new dimension and desire—to my life that I needed to fulfill."

As he began his search for new ways to love God and serve his neighbor, God began sending people into his life "who either needed love or who were willing to offer love" He began to sense that he was being called to connect these two groups of people. As he began searching for how he might do that, he experienced more of what he calls "seemingly unrelated events that made no sense until later."

To understand immigration issues, he took an online course on "Immigration and US Citizenship." That was followed by an online course on

As Jere continued his discipleship journey, the Holy Spirit began probing more deeply into his life.

- Did Jesus say, "Let the little children come unto me so that I can see if they are properly documented" or did he

say, "Let the children come to me"?

- Did Jesus say, "I died on the cross to save only US citizens from the consequences of their sins" or did he say, "I

died on the cross to save all from the consequences of their sins"?

- Which takes first priority in your life? Are you an American first? Or are you a Christian first?

At a civic luncheon Jere met a person who was already doing God's work in the migrant community. As they talked, Jere became energized by the opportunities to serve the academically talented migrant farm worker students and their families. Two high school graduates had been awarded scholarships, but their undocumented parents were unable to provide for other college expenses like transportation, clothing, food, and insurance.

As Jere began to visit the families in the migrant camps, he met other talented students and began to see what God was calling him to do. Along the way, God was sending him people from his church who were willing to share their love with these students and their families. Together they began responding to the opportunities before them by helping academically gifted students find their way to higher education.

At the time of this writing, they have supported twenty-six students who have attended ten different colleges and universities.

When winter came he learned that the children of the farm workers had no warm clothing, so this team worked with a local department store to supply winter clothing at a reduced cost. As word of the need spread, the community began to donate large quantities of blankets and warm clothing. He arranged for the Agape Food Bank to provide healthy food for 20 cents a pound. When a new baby was on the way, he arranged for a family to deliver the crib and baby supplies. When one student needed a cochlear implant, he found doctors and donors to make it happen.

Responding to God's call on his own life, Jere is also equipping other people who have limited amounts of flexible time to be involved in the ministry.

One businessman who has more than enough work to keep him busy gets up early every Wednesday morning to go to the Agape Food Bank where he picks up food that he and another volunteers deliver to migrant families. When asked why he does it, he said, "It comes from a place of passion and purpose. I work at my job to pay the bills, but this is where my heart is."

Jere laughs out loud when he says that he is having the time of his life connecting people who need love with people who offer love. "It is not about us. It's not even about the migrant students and their families. It's about God's love for us and our need to respond to His love for us.' To visit the workers' homes with him is to experience the deep joy that only comes to those who follow their passion and find their place to serve. Jere has found the place where his great gladness met the world's great need.

We believe that this story points us all to SEEING new callings throughout our life times , and sharing the stories of callings and new callings through the life of the church.